



San Francisco Department of Public Health

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Director of Health

City and County of San Francisco
London N. Breed
Mayor

Director's Report for Health Commission Meeting of January 4, 2022

A current overview of issues affecting the state of public health in San Francisco

<https://www.dph.org/dph/comupg/aboutdph/insideDept/dirRpts/default.asp>

Today, there are over 61,000 San Francisco residents with confirmed cases of COVID-19. And, sadly, a total of 685 San Franciscans have died. The San Francisco Department of Public Health (DPH) sends our condolences to their loved ones.

DPH reaffirms support for in-person learning despite presence of COVID-19 Omicron variant. Health and safety protocols have kept schools open despite the pandemic and are further encouraged as students and staff return to school following the holidays

As families prepare for a return to school following the holidays, DPH reaffirms its support for the resumption of in-person learning despite rising COVID-19 cases due to the Omicron variant. Multiple layers of health and safety protocols have kept school settings open this year despite COVID-19, and DPH urges families and schools to continue following these recommendations to allow for a safer return to school.

“San Francisco has remained vigilant and beat back four surges, and we are well positioned with a highly vaccinated population to do the same with this current surge due to Omicron,” said Dr. Grant Colfax, San Francisco Director of Public Health. “Throughout the pandemic, San Francisco schools have remained low-risk settings by following proper safety protocols – let’s work together to keep it that way.”

Getting vaccinated and boosted, testing after travel and gatherings, staying home when sick, and wearing well-fitted masks are key to keeping schools open for in-person learning.

“I appreciate this guidance from our public health experts on the importance of keeping our students safely in the classroom,” said Mayor London Breed. “We know how hard the last two years have been on our kids, and we need to focus on what’s best to support them, while also putting policies in place to ensure that everyone in our schools is protected.”

When rates of COVID are high in our communities, cases will appear at schools, just as they do in other settings. However, with effective health protocols in place, the data shows that these multiple layers of defense can stop the spread of COVID in school settings.

CDC recently announced its support for an additional valuable tool in school settings as part of its layered prevention strategy called Test to Stay. Test to Stay combines contact tracing and COVID-19 testing that is repeated at least twice during a seven-day period post-exposure to allow



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asymptomatic school-associated close contacts who are not fully vaccinated and do not test positive for COVID-19 to continue in-person learning. Students who participate in Test to Stay should consistently and correctly wear masks while in school and should stay home and isolate if they develop symptoms or test positive for COVID-19.

DPH continues to support strategies that safely keep as many kids in schools, such as the CDC's Test to Stay tool, which is similar to the modified quarantine guidance that DPH supported and allowed since the beginning of the school year. More information on the modified quarantine guidance is available here: <https://www.sfdph.org/dph/covid-19/isolation-and-quarantine.asp#school>.

"We must do everything possible to keep students safely attending schools," said Dr. Susan Philip, San Francisco Health Officer. "The mental health impacts on students due to social isolation far outweigh the challenges of in-person learning."

Safer Return to School Recommendations

- Testing
 - All students and staff are recommended to get tested for COVID-19 regardless of vaccination status 1-2 days before returning to school or work, even if they are asymptomatic.
 - If families or staff have traveled over the holidays, DPH recommends testing 3-5 days after returning from travel.
 - If any students or staff test positive, please notify your school immediately and follow isolation and quarantine guidelines: <https://www.sfdph.org/dph/COVID-19/Isolation-and-Quarantine.asp>. Individuals who need assistance with isolation can connect with the COVID Resource Center at (628) 217-6101.
 - COVID-19 testing sites and resources: <https://sf.gov/find-out-about-your-covid-19-testing-options>
 - San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) specific testing resources: <https://www.sfusd.edu/covid-19-response-updates-and-resources/covid-19-surveillance-testing-students/covid-19-testing-locations-and-dates>
- Stay Home When Sick
 - Students, teachers and staff who have symptoms of infectious illness, such as COVID-19 or the flu, should stay home and be referred to their healthcare provider for testing and care, regardless of vaccination status.
- Vaccination
 - Everyone who is eligible (currently open to age 5 and above) for a COVID-19 vaccine should get vaccinated and stay up to date with boosters (currently open to age 16 and above if enough time has passed since their initial vaccination).
 - COVID-19 vaccination sites and resources: <https://sf.gov/get-vaccinated-against-covid-19>
- Face Coverings



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- A well-fitted mask that can be comfortably worn is most important.
- Double masking is an effective way to improve fit and filtration. A close-fitting cloth mask can be worn on top of a surgical/disposable mask to improve the seal of the mask to the face.
- Additional masking resources:
<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/COVID-19/Get-the-Most-out-of-Masking.aspx>

SF temporarily tightens universal indoor masking requirement and augments vaccination requirements amid Omicron surge. Indoor mega-events will require up-to-date vaccinations, including boosters, starting February 1, 2022.

On December 29, 2021, Mayor Breed and San Francisco Health Director Dr. Grant Colfax announced updates to the [Safer Return Together Health Order](#) in response to the sharp increase of COVID-19 cases driven by the rapidly-spreading Omicron variant. Major changes include (1) the City's alignment with the State to require boosters among workers in healthcare and high-risk settings – as well as some additional higher-risk settings not covered by the State requirements – by February 1, 2022, (2) a temporary suspension of the indoor universal mask exemption that allowed removal of masks for stable groups of 100% fully vaccinated individuals in certain settings, and (3) a requirement that attendees and staff of indoor mega-events are up-to-date on COVID-19 vaccinations, including boosters if eligible, starting February 1, 2022.

In addition, DPH plans to align its guidance on Isolation & Quarantine with the recently announced modifications recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the California Department of Public Health (CDPH), which include shortening the isolation time for people who are COVID-positive.

“Our residents have shown time and time again that they understand the importance of protecting public health,” said Mayor London Breed. “Thanks to our high vaccination rates we are in a much better place than last winter, but there is real danger out there for those who are unvaccinated. We will continue to focus on taking the steps necessary to deal with this latest surge of cases, while also keeping our businesses open and keeping our kids in school, which is so important for our young people and their families. Do your part and get yourself and your family boosted so we can all continue to protect each other in the weeks and months ahead.”

San Francisco's COVID-19 7-day average case rate as of December 21, 2021 was 398, surpassing the peak average during the Delta surge, and more recent data show the rate has continued to increase in the past week. Cases are rising three times faster than during the summer Delta-fueled surge and further rapid increases are expected. While the hospitals currently still have ample capacity, the rate of hospitalizations has also started to increase but so far remains low compared to last Winter.



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“We know that our focus in this Omicron surge must be on reducing hospitalizations and maintaining our capacity to care for San Franciscans, and these measures will help ensure this,” said Dr. Susan Philip, San Francisco Health Officer. “We do not want to wait until it’s too late to implement these measures to better protect our community.”

San Francisco is taking precautionary measures to keep schools and businesses open, and limit severe illness, hospitalizations and deaths.

“As COVID-19 becomes endemic, we need to ensure everyone eligible gets vaccinated and boosted, we sustain our hospital capacity, and protect the most vulnerable – these updates to the Health Order help us achieve that,” said Dr. Grant Colfax, San Francisco Director of Public Health.

Several changes to the Health Order are temporary as the City continues to monitor impacts of the Omicron variant.

“While it is difficult to move backward after all the progress the City has made, the Omicron variant has shown that responsible steps, including introducing a short-term mask mandate, should be taken to bridge the gap until all residents have the opportunity to benefit from the protection of a booster shot,” said the San Francisco Independent Fitness Studio Coalition. “We know fitness plays a crucial role in helping people stay both mentally and physically safe as we battle this pandemic, and our employees and clients are ready to meet the moment and do their part to protect the residents of San Francisco.”

In addition to the Health Order update, DPH will be updating local guidance on isolation and quarantine. The CDC announced that people who test positive for COVID-19 but are asymptomatic are recommended to isolate for 5 days instead of the previously recommended 10 days, with masking for an additional 5 days.

The CDC also announced that for people who are unvaccinated or are more than six months out from their second mRNA dose (or more than 2 months after the J&J vaccine) and not yet boosted, individuals are recommended to quarantine for 5 days followed by strict mask use for an additional 5 days. Alternatively, if a 5-day quarantine is not feasible, CDC considers it imperative that an exposed person wear a well-fitted mask at all times when around others for 10 days after exposure.

For individuals who have received their booster shot, the CDC states these individuals do not need to quarantine following an exposure, but should wear a mask for 10 days after the exposure.

DPH will formally adopt these policies once written guidance is adopted by the CDC and CDPH. DPH will provide updates to local Isolation & Quarantine guidance here:

<https://www.sfdph.org/dph/COVID-19/Isolation-and-Quarantine.asp>



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Summary of Key Changes to the Health Order:

Booster Requirements for Workers in Healthcare and High-Risk Settings

The State of California recently announced that workers in healthcare and certain other high-risk settings must receive a booster by February 1, 2022. San Francisco's revised Order conforms to the updated State Health Order and extends the booster requirement to other designated higher-risk settings that are already covered by San Francisco's previous requirements for personnel in those settings to receive their full initial series of the COVID-19 vaccine.

Personnel working in high-risk settings who are eligible for a booster and have not yet received one must be tested once or twice a week for COVID-19 (depending on the setting) and provide proof of a negative test until one week after they receive a booster. Due to the threat Omicron poses to hospital capacity, eligible personnel in high-risk settings are strongly urged to receive their booster as soon as possible before the deadline.

Temporary Suspension of Indoor Universal Masking Exemption

The Order suspends the indoor universal masking exemption for stable cohorts of 100% fully vaccinated people in select settings including workspaces, gyms, religious gatherings starting at 12:01 a.m. on December 30, 2021 until January 31, 2022.

CDPH imposed a universal indoor masking requirement for the state on December 14, 2021, but granted exemptions to San Francisco and other counties that already had local indoor masking policies in place. This update to the Order brings San Francisco in alignment with the State. Universal masking means the requirements apply to everyone, regardless of their vaccination status.

Additionally, participants in indoor youth sports are required to wear masks through January 31, 2022.

Up-to-Date Vaccinations

The Order adds the concept of being "up-to-date on vaccination" which includes having received a COVID-19 booster when eligible, similar to other types of vaccines that are recommended for regular upkeep. For information on booster eligibility, visit: <https://sf.gov/information/get-your-booster>

Beginning February 1, 2022, operators and hosts of indoor mega-events (1,000 people or more under state and local guidelines) are required to verify proof of up-to-date vaccinations, which includes a booster received at least one week prior to an event, for eligible patrons and staff. Patrons between 5



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and 11 years old (or their parents or guardians) must show proof of full vaccination or a negative COVID-19 test taken within one day (for antigen tests) or two days (for PCR tests) prior to entry into the event venue, and children between 2 and 4 years old need a negative test.

Operators and hosts of large outdoor events (with between 5,000 and 9,999 people) and outdoor mega-events (10,000 people or more under state guidelines) are encouraged to consider the same up-to-date vaccination verification as indoor mega-events.

The Order strongly urges that certain indoor facilities that currently must check for proof of full vaccination, such as restaurants, bars, clubs, and gyms and other fitness centers, require patrons and staff to show proof that they are up-to-date on vaccination, including boosters if those individuals are eligible, and to implement that requirement as soon as possible.

Schools

The updated Health Order clarifies, in relation to schools, that based on the demonstrated effectiveness of measures that reduce the risk of transmission in school settings, including the requirement for universal masking indoors, the use of rapid testing, and vaccinations for children age five and older, the Health Officer strongly believes that schools can and should remain open for in-person classes for all grades. The Order strongly recommends that teachers, staff, and administrators in TK-12 schools be up-to-date on vaccination, including boosters, and the Health Officer will be updating school and youth-related directives to require masks for participants in indoor youth sports, through January 31, 2022.

Skilled Nursing Facilities

The Health Officer will also be issuing a temporary requirement later this week regarding visitors, requiring on-site testing of visitors at the time of the visit and limiting the number of visitors per day through the end of January 2022 in order to further protect residents at those facilities.

Updates to the Health Order will be available at: <https://www.sfdph.org/dph/alerts/coronavirus-healthorders.asp>

Additional COVID-19 resources are available at: <https://sf.gov/topics/coronavirus-covid-19>



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As Omicron variant rapidly spreads, DPH supports drop in sites for boosters and tests, recommends better masks.

On December 23, 2021 DPH announced drop in sites for vaccines, boosters and testing are available at select locations in the City over the next several weeks to support easy access to these essential services during the holiday surge.

Every person counts when it comes to boosters right now, as the primary dose vaccination series is not enough to prevent the spread of infection, severe illness, or hospitalization. Cases are rising three times faster than during the summer Delta-fueled surge. Further rapid increases are expected. The benefits of a booster dose begin to rise in just a few days and reach maximum effectiveness in a week.

“Omicron is rapidly spreading, and all evidence points to the fact that we need to do more to protect ourselves and others from infection,” said Dr. Grant Colfax, Director of Health. “Boosters are key right now for your own protection and those you love. We also want people to celebrate the holidays more safely and with an extra dose of caution, and that includes layering our defenses and taking extra caution around those who are at higher risk, including people who are elderly, immunocompromised, or unvaccinated like small children.”

To increase access, DPH has identified a number of vaccination sites open for drop-ins for booster doses across the City (see below), while appointments are also available across our health system sites. Additionally, DPH is making drop-in testing available at over 20 sites, and our sites are expanding testing to administer 20,000 tests per week to support the City’s high demand for tests right now.

As people travel and gather for the holidays, they should layer their defense against the Omicron variant through vaccines, boosters, testing, and [wearing an N95 or well fitted “double” mask](#) (cloth on top of surgical/disposable mask) to improve the seal of the mask to the face. A well-fitted mask that can be comfortably worn is most important. Limiting the size and number of indoor gatherings also reduces risk.

San Francisco detected the first case of Omicron in the United States on December 1. A recent analysis from a sample of positive COVID-19 tests shows 77% of the positive test results are likely Omicron, indicating how quickly the new variant is replacing the Delta variant in the population. While Omicron may on average cause less serious illness than Delta, transmission is so much higher that San Francisco is likely to see high rates of hospitalizations in the coming weeks.

Our current modeling shows how imperative it is to boost as many San Franciscans as possible and as quickly as possible in order to decrease the load on hospitals and to preserve capacity to serve people with COVID and other health situations not related to COVID. DPH also launched [a new](#)



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[data page](#) for the public to track the City's booster efforts.

How to celebrate safer this holiday season:

Have everyone ages 5+ get their COVID-19 vaccine and booster if eligible.

- Anyone who develops symptoms of COVID-19 should isolate themselves and get tested as soon as possible.
- Get tested before travel, upon return, and again 3-5 days later.
- Take advantage of quick and easy home test kits available in pharmacies and stores.
- Outside gatherings are safer than indoor gatherings. Limit number and size of indoor gatherings.
- Take all precautions, including vaccinations, boosters and testing when gathering with others without masks – especially with elderly or immunocompromised individuals, and anyone who is unvaccinated or not yet boosted.
- Wear a well-fitted mask indoors and in crowded settings. Wear an N95 or double mask with surgical and cloth to improve the seal.
- Unvaccinated adults should avoid travel and gatherings outside their household.

What to do if you test positive for COVID:

Individuals who test positive, including if they are asymptomatic, should assume they are infected with COVID-19 and take measures to get care and isolate away from others. They should additionally notify their healthcare provider about their positive test result and stay in contact with them during their illness. Individuals who do not have a provider or need assistance with isolation, can connect with our COVID Resource Center at (628) 217-6101.

More information about what to do if you test positive [can be found here](#).

State of Emergency Declaration in the Tenderloin

On December 23, 2021, the Board of Supervisors voted to approve Mayor Breed's State of Emergency Declaration in the Tenderloin, officially allowing the City to waive certain laws to quickly address the crisis of people dying of drug overdoses on the streets of the neighborhood as part of the Mayor's Tenderloin Emergency Intervention Plan.

Similar to the City's COVID-19 Declaration of Emergency, this action will eliminate bureaucratic barriers, allowing the City to quickly implement public health solutions relating to the health and safety of the people in the Tenderloin. The overdose problem has worsened, particularly over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, but the recent rapidly deteriorating conditions in the Tenderloin caused by the opioid crisis put the lives of San Franciscans in serious risk.

"The Tenderloin needs change, and that requires us to do things different," said Mayor Breed. We showed during COVID that when we're able to use an Emergency Declaration to cut through the bureaucracy and barriers that get in the way of decisive action, we can get things done and make real, tangible progress. It will take that same focus and coordination in the Tenderloin to make a



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meaningful change to this neighborhood that has been held back for too long. I want to thank the members of the Board that voted to support this urgent response and who understand that the people who live in the Tenderloin deserve better and the people suffering on our streets deserve better.”

The Emergency Declaration allows the City to expedite the implementation of emergency programs like waiving rules around contract procurement and waiving zoning and planning codes to quickly open a temporary linkage site where people with substance use issues can receive behavioral health services and get off the street. The Emergency Declaration will apply to actions taken within the [boundaries of the Tenderloin Police District](#). Additionally, the Order will be amended to waive certain laws around hiring, which allows for the expedited hiring of 200 behavioral health clinicians to fill current vacancies.

“In an emergency, people need resources immediately not months from now. An emergency declaration allows San Francisco to cut through the red tape and obtain the contracts, resources and personnel to address the crisis conditions in the Tenderloin,” said Mary Ellen Carroll, Executive Director, San Francisco Department of Emergency Management. “We only have to look at our COVID response to see how an emergency declaration allowed us to quickly lease hotels, hire critical staff and establish testing and vaccine sites. Today’s action will expedite the opening of a linkage center and other essential resources.”

“Overdose deaths are a public health crisis in the Tenderloin neighborhood that requires an urgent and compassionate response,” said Dr. Grant Colfax, Director of Health. “San Francisco has shown what we can achieve when we come together for a common public health goal. At the Department of Public Health, we have evidence-based health tools to support people with mental health and substance use disorders. These tools save lives and support our residents on their path to wellness and recovery. The Emergency Declaration provides us with a critical opportunity to greatly expand our services and connect many more people to resources, care, treatment, and safety.”

“We are grateful that the City and the Mayor will now have the tools needed to address the public health emergency in the Tenderloin,” said Simon Bertrang, Executive Director, Tenderloin Community Benefit District. “We saw that this kind of response - led by the Department of Emergency Management - has worked to guide San Francisco through the pandemic, and now people who live and work in the Tenderloin can expect some relief from the crisis that has taken over their sidewalks.”

[DPH in the News](#)